



(U) Machines Translating Arabic

FROM: SIGINT Communications

Run Date: 01/21/2004

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(U) NSAers are participating in a study to answer the question: "How good must Arabic machine translation tools be to be operationally useful?"

(U) Since 2001, the U.S. Government's need for Arabic translation skills has surged dramatically. With military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq ongoing, and Arabic linguists in high demand, the government began several projects to develop an effective Arabic machine translation (MT) tool. NAIC, Ft. Huachuca, CIA and DARPA all put funds into separate efforts. Government officials soon realized that it would be smarter to concentrate the funding on the one or two most promising projects, instead of scattering the money among several. The question remained, however: which are most promising?

(U) To get to the bottom of this question, the Center for Advanced Study of Language (CASL), formed last year at the University of Maryland, was tasked with conducting a task-based evaluation of some of the Arabic MTs that were funded in 2003. (This evaluation was proposed by John Kovarik, NSA's Senior Language Technology Authority.) Such a study is now underway. With the help of NSA analysts, CASL will study how well three representative MTs -- each representative of a different approach -- work for analysts who are not familiar with Arabic.

(U) The study will work like this: unclassified documents will be sent through the three systems. The output will then be randomly presented to NSA analysts in such a way that they will not know which system produced which output. The analysts will then read the documents and try to answer various questions, based on what they have read. Software will grade the answers and track how long the analysts take to answer the questions. These "grades" will then be summed to measure how well the three MTs work.

(U) **NSA analysts are currently being sought to volunteer to participate in the study.** Participants will be trained and take the "tests" at UMD on January 26. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact John Kovarik ([REDACTED] nsa; [REDACTED]) or Lynn Carlson (Senior Technical Director of CASL's Government Oversight Board), externally at CASL: [REDACTED]@casl.umd.edu; [REDACTED]

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